

Waterbury State Office Complex Leadership

In this Waterbury website article, Hal Cohen, the Secretary of the Vermont Agency of Human Services, shares his thoughts with us regarding the new Waterbury State Office Complex (WSOC).

How is the work on the new WSOC progressing?

HC: *Month by month and week by week, the WSOC is making great progress. A lot of sheetrock has been added and windows installed giving the interiors a more finished look. The new building, as well as the historic core, is progressing on schedule. In my recent visit, there were over 300 contractors working on site. It took a lot of work to demolish the old building's interior to the bare brick, properly dispose of any hazardous materials and bring a 125 year old building up to current code.*

The work going on at the WSOC site is busy and intense with laborers, and I quickly realized how difficult it would be to have staff come and visit the site. With that being said, I realize that managers and staff who will be moving to Waterbury are eager to tour the facility. Building and General Services (BGS) will be conducting site tours for the public from May to October 2015. These tours are conducted on the first Saturday of each month starting at 9:30 AM. Due to the construction site being a hard hat area, the focus of these public tours are the perimeter of the site.

The [BGS WEBSITE](#) will be continually updated with photos and information to provide realistic previews of the space as the internal finish work moves forward.

What is the Agency's vision for the new WSOC?

HC: *I see the WSOC helping to promote the "Agency of One" vision. This facility will bring together many of the Agency's staff under one roof. Having staff from our departments and divisions in a common location will greatly help to support a more collaborative atmosphere. This setting will promote our efforts to integrate services for Vermonters.*

In addition to the high-level Agency "vision", the new WSOC is an incredible physical "vision." The views from the windows, the architecture, open layout, light and airiness all help to create a workspace that will be both functional and productive. The new building and office environment will be a wonderful place to come to work.

In my previous work as Director of Capstone Community Action, our team also moved to a new office space. Like many changes, my experience was that staff members were initially apprehensive about an open space environment, but found that they really enjoyed the beautiful and functional lay out of the new facility.

What are the Agency's goals that support the vision?

HC: *The primary goal is to break down the information silos that have stifled some communication and collaboration efforts and to help us move to a more modern and integrated work environment. In doing so, this will help us communicate more easily through a common language inspired by the open workspaces. The goal of the new WSOC is to provide departments and staff with the best possible work*

space the location permits. The result will help the Agency attain its mission: “To improve the conditions and well-being of Vermonters and protect those who cannot protect themselves.”

What are the Agency’s objectives for the new WSOC?

HC: *The objectives of the WSOC closely reflect those of the State of Vermont. We are bringing about 800 people back to Waterbury where we once worked. We preserved and renovated a building with over 125 years of history. We have used local materials in the renovation and construction and since the beginning of the project we have diverted 95% of our waste stream materials from the landfill. The renovation of the historic core building and construction of the new building has improved the entire WSOC campus.*

Tropical Storm Irene and the resulting flood were a disaster, but it also was the stimulus to turn an aging facility into a state-of-the-art campus. We have been able to overcome the tragedy, hold on to our past history and move forward to the future. The restoration of the Waterbury facility will give all of us a sense of pride and accomplishment.

Will all the Agency staff move to Waterbury?

HC: *Not everyone will be going back to Waterbury. While this is a huge facility, it will not, however, fit all Agency departments, divisions and staff. The VDH will remain in Burlington and some staff from DVHA, DCF, and AHS Central Office will remain in Chittenden County. That said most of the AHS staff will move to Waterbury and in the future, there may be additional space available in the Waterbury area for occupancy.*

Our goal is to optimize the space we have and to ensure we have adequate space in both Waterbury and Chittenden County to foster communication and collaboration across multiple locations. The WSOC will house a number of focus rooms and conference rooms to promote stronger collaboration, and provide offsite employees the opportunity for hoteling spaces. The new facility is designed to provide all our staff, onsite and offsite, the ability to come together when integrated efforts are needed.

The new facility will have a café and common open areas. The grassy park-like areas surrounding the buildings will be great for breaks, and the closeness to town will encourage walks to local business for lunch. I see the relocation to the WSOC not just as a return to our former home, but also a way to support the local Waterbury community that has suffered since the flood of 2011.

What other thoughts and ideas do you have regarding the WSOC?

HC: *Moving to a new location and a new office environment may, at first, be daunting. The new office environment will require some changes and trade-offs. For example, some loss of privacy will be compensated by gains in community and comradery. Large scale change can invoke stress, uncertainty and insecurity. At the same time change offers the potential for opportunity, growth, adventure, excitement and challenge.*

We understand that some people will have anxiety related to the upcoming changes and may experience some resistance to the move. I want to ensure staff that we have a great WSOC change

management team working diligently to make the move an easier transition for staff. This team will be hosting a variety of workshops and open brown bag events for questions and concerns. We will be providing help and assistance in the form of regular and relevant communications, – we are here to help. All we ask is for your patience and understanding – give it a chance to work!

I have faith in the resilience of our staff, and in their open-mindedness, creativity and ability to overcome obstacles. I am committed to leading our organization through this change and ensuring that the staff placed in both Waterbury, Chittenden County and around the district offices, feel a strong sense of belonging to our agency and a sense of pride for the work we do for and with Vermonters. I am looking forward to continuing to working closely with everyone and continuing to provide Vermonters with the high level of service they have come to expect and receive from the Agency of Human Services.